

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Hatsue Sakumoto, 81, retired camp fish store owner,
Puunene

Hatsue (Fujita) Sakumoto, Japanese, was born July 10, 1898, in Tamana, Kumamoto, Japan. Her father was a greengrocer and her grandfather tended the village furo.

After completing the sixth grade, Sakumoto entered a midwives' training school. Since one had to be twenty-four years old to be a midwife, she became a nurse instead. She did this because she did not wish to remain in the village and do farm work.

In 1921, Sakumoto married and came to Hawaii. She first worked as a nurse for a Japanese doctor in Wailuku.

Sakumoto opened a fish store in 1923. Her husband died in 1935, but she continued store operations. In 1978, she closed the store. The building still stands today.

Sakumoto attends the Hale Mahaolu Senior Citizens' Lunch Program and enjoys reading.

A summary of a recorded interview held in Kahului with Sakumoto follows.

Tape No. 7-27-2-80 TR

NOTES FROM RECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Hatsue Sakumoto

January 26, 1980

Kahului, Maui

BY: Yukihiha Suzuki and Warren Nishimoto

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation and summary by Scott Lehman.]

Hatsue Sakumoto and her husband, Torahiko Sakumoto, were married in Japan and came to Hawaii aboard the Shinyo-maru on March 1, 1921. Mr. Sakumoto worked at the HC&S [Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company] Puunene Mill. Since Mrs. Sakumoto had been a nurse in Japan, she worked for a Dr. Ohata in Wailuku. Because she couldn't speak any English, she was unable to pass the test required to work as a nurse in Hawaii. The Sakumotos therefore sought other means of making money. Mr. Sakumoto asked permission from the plantation to start a business. They were allowed to open a store, provided they sell only fish in the beginning.

In December of 1923, the Sakumotos started the fish market in Mill Camp in Puunene. Once they had the permit, there were no problems with the plantation. Because no one had a car back then, people couldn't go into Kahului to shop when the day's work was done. So the plantation boss let them start selling fish as a service to the workers. Sakumoto's husband quit his job at the mill and came to work in the store. They were the first in that area to open a fish market, but soon, two other Japanese-run fish markets opened in nearby camps. There were also restaurants and other businesses, some of which were run by Filipinos, but the fish markets were all run by Japanese. There were over ten businesses in Mill Camp and nearby Camp 4. Sometimes peddlers would come into the camp, but apparently not on a regular basis.

When asked why she started selling fish in the first place, Sakumoto laughs and confesses that she can't think of a reason. She used to have to get up at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning to go pick up the fish in Kihei. Her husband hid the money under his shirt and went. It wasn't an easy business at first--not knowing how to fillet the fish properly, or even if fish would be available from day to day. As a result, her husband often used to wonder if they shouldn't have sold chickens or opened a restaurant instead. Although her husband was a little better at it, she herself had a lot of trouble cutting the fish properly for sashimi. They also apparently had a lot of trouble with people who

would charge things and then not pay. Before World War II, there was especially a lot of trouble with that because people were only paid once a month by the plantation.

When they first started the business, they had to buy a truck to pick up the fish. Although Sakumoto doesn't recall the amount of capital required to start their store, she remembers that they bought a small Ford truck and an old-fashioned icebox. She thinks that her husband probably borrowed from a tanomoshi to get the money to start, since tanomoshi was very popular then. They got fifty pounds of ice for the icebox for only forty or fifty cents from Star Ice and Soda Works or Maui Soda and Ice Works. Much later, they bought a large electric refrigerator for about a thousand dollars. That electric refrigerator was so big and heavy that Sakumoto still has it because even after the store closed, she couldn't find anyone willing to carry it away. She thought it might be good for a florist, but it was so heavy that even when she offered to give it away for free, no one would take it. They had originally bought the refrigerator on an installment basis, so buying it wasn't too much of a problem.

Sakumoto and her husband actually sold a variety of things in the store besides fresh fish. They also sold fishcakes, soda pop, Nashiwa's bread, canned goods--everything except meat. They avoided meat primarily because the bones made it very difficult for a woman to cut--fish was easier. She was taught to fillet the fish by her husband, who was much better at it--especially sashimi--than she was. Her husband apparently learned by watching other people. The fish from Lahaina was the freshest; the ones from Kihei weren't good because they were caught from onshore and had fat on them. They also sold hot dogs, particularly to one restaurant, which always called up and ordered by telephone.

Sakumoto's husband was a member of a fish cooperative with Minoru Hayashida, another interviewee. Hayashida was a very clever man who made soy sauce during the war because soy sauce was scarce then. One had to be in the cooperative to get any fish then because no one else sold fish wholesale. Fish dealers really had difficult hours. One had to get up in the middle of the night to go pick up the fish--it was not like a modern company employee who goes to work at 8 o'clock in the morning. When asked if they had to buy shares in the fishing cooperative to get in, Sakumoto says that they did not--that they only had to buy shares to get vegetables. They had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to place their order for vegetables and then go down around 6 o'clock to pick them up, otherwise there wouldn't be any left. She admits that they probably did have to pay some money to get into the fishing cooperative, but she doesn't remember too much about that. They used to contact a lady who ran a little store on the way to Lahaina, and she would tell them if she could see the fishing boats heading into port. Even if they didn't know about the boats coming in, somebody would get a call.

Fish dealership wasn't for young people. There was even a man in Paia who had taken over the fish business after his father died, but he just couldn't take it and soon quit. The fish mostly came into Lahaina

or Kihei, and only rarely would Sakumoto and her husband go to Kahului. But the fishing cooperative always called and told them when the fish would be coming in. They also went to Lahaina to get some special kind of red fish. They sometimes stayed over in Lahaina from the thirtieth or thirty-first of December so that they could get red fish for New Year's Day. Sakumoto also says that Hayashida got his fish from the cooperative, but she is unsure whether he went to Lahaina, Wailuku, or Kahului to pick up the fish.

When asked about the people who came to buy things at the store, Sakumoto says that a lot of Filipinos came. She took the entrails of the fish, or even the fleshy parts that were a little past prime, and used them to make bagoong. She bought empty cracker tins and sold the bagoong in those tins, which held one gallon each. She made it by finely grinding up the entrails with a machine until they were liquefied and then added Hawaiian salt. The Filipinos said it was very good and used it the way the Japanese used soy sauce. But because the Filipinos ate such salty and spicy foods, Sakumoto says they had a lot of high blood pressure, diabetes, and other such ailments. A friend named Miyake who worked at Star Ice and Soda Works also made bagoong and made a lot of money selling it. Some other people even brought menpachi from Honolulu, but it was very expensive. Other people also made salted fish, kamaboko, tempura, and other fried fish products. Because the Filipinos ate rice, they also ate a lot of fish like the Japanese did. The Portuguese, however, ate a lot of bread and soup, so they didn't like fish much. Sakumoto apparently didn't have much trouble communicating with the Filipinos who came to the store--she gradually learned to understand. But when young schoolchildren came to buy something, she sometimes couldn't understand, so she had one of her daughters come down from the house and help her. Sakumoto also sold the cracker tins full of bagoong to the people who came over from Molokai and Lanai.

For the Maui County Fair held each October, she made the bagoong in five-gallon containers and then transferred it to the one-gallon tins. Some people bought it and then put it in smaller containers for resale. While she was making it, she would have to keep stirring it, off and on, all day long because the coarse Hawaiian salt would settle to the bottom and the fish would rise to the top. She also made sure the bagoong was kept in a shady place while it was being made. Her young son sometimes helped her make the bagoong, but he didn't like it and complained about having to mix the bagoong. He especially disliked the grinding machine. Sakumoto once tried chopping up the fish by hand to make bagoong, but the pieces would be too big and would never dissolve properly. She would clean the entrails thoroughly before grinding them up, but she never used the bones for bagoong. How much bagoong she made at one time depended on how many fish they got, and she used every part of the tuna to make something.

Because fish was not available during the war, the Sakumotos received permission from the plantation to sell dry goods and other things. Almost every day, some delivery man brought something to the store. Nashiwa Bakery brought bread and Hata Shōkai brought canned goods. After the war,

when fish was available again, the Sakumotos resumed the fish business.

Sakumoto says that unlike Hayashida, who only had two or three children and was able to own his own house, she and her husband had eight children to educate, so they weren't able to own their own house.

When asked why she quit the store, Sakumoto says that after her husband died in 1963, she couldn't sell fish anymore, and that the profit margin on other goods like canned goods was fixed, so she couldn't make much money on them. When the interviewer points out that Sakumoto did run the store for several years after her husband's death, she says that her children persuaded her to finally close because people were mostly shopping at the supermarkets and other big stores, and there was very little business at such a small store as hers.

When asked whether she likes it better in Kahului than in Puunene where the store was, Sakumoto describes the poor condition of her house in Puunene and the trouble they had over there when there were storms and power outages. She wonders how she even managed to stay there as long as she did.

**STORES and
STOREKEEPERS of
Paia & Puunene, Maui**

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